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ABSTRACT

A study examined the characteristics, experiences, and performance of undergraduates enrolled in part-time degree programs at polytechnics and colleges in Great Britain. Data were collected from questionnaires completed by 2,876 (of 4,227 contacted) part-time undergraduates enrolled in 66 courses in 1985. The median age of the respondents was 30, and nearly two-thirds were male. Most were married and in paid employment, and most had left school at the age of 17 or younger. Part-time day release and evening classes were by far the most commonly encountered forms of previous part-time study. The part-time students generally held higher qualifications at program entry than did their mature full-time counterparts. Only 13 percent of the part-time entrants did not hold the conventional minimum entry requirements as opposed to 37 percent of those entering Open University undergraduate courses. Improvement in career prospects was most commonly reported as students' main motivation for enrollment. Most part-time undergraduates were completing nonhonors courses, whereas most full-time students complete honors courses. One year after the original questionnaire, almost two-thirds of the original respondents were still enrolled, and over one-fifth had completed their courses successfully. (MN)

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Students on CNAA's part-time first degree courses

Summary report

Tom Bourner, Mahmood Hamed, Ronald Barnett and Andy Reynolds

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CNAA Development Services Publication 16

Students on CNAA's part-time first degree courses
A summary report

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A CNAA Development Services project
conducted at Brighton Polytechnic

Preface

This report provides a summary of the findings and recommendations of a project undertaken at Brighton Polytechnic.

The project was commissioned by CNAA Development Services and carried out by Tom Bourner with Mahmoud Hamed, Ronald Barnett and Andy Reynolds.

The report contains important findings for those concerned with access to higher education. It should be of particular interest to those engaged in the part-time mode of provision and its development.

In particular, it is hoped that course teams will find in the report ideas from other part-time degree courses and from the experience of the students that will be helpful in developing and operating their own courses. By widening awareness of the diversity of practices the report also represents a contribution to the dissemination of 'good practice'.

A copy of the full report from which the summary contained in this publication was extracted can be obtained from CNAA Development Services, Council for National Academic Awards, 344–354 Gray's Inn Road, London WC1X 8BP.

Alan Crispin
Registrar for Development Services

The views expressed in this summary report are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the CNAA.

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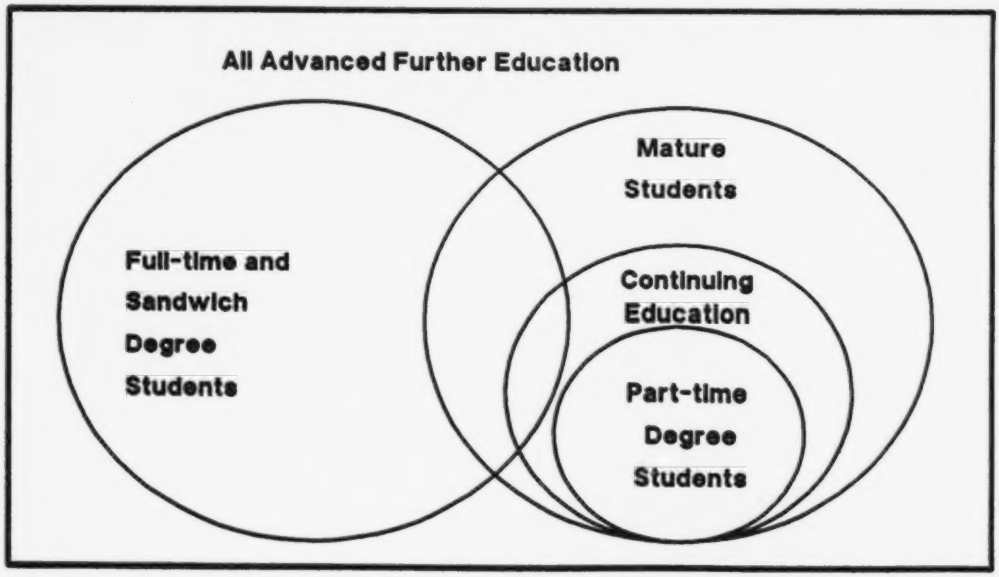
1. The enquiry

1.1 Background

Part-time higher education is sometimes regarded as one of the more distinctive features of the work of the polytechnics and colleges related to the Council for National Academic Awards (CNAA). Compared with full-time and sandwich courses, however, the information available on part-time higher education is very limited. This is illustrated, for example, by the fact that the Department of Education and Science (DES) collects data on the degree performance of full-time and sandwich students but not on those who complete part-time courses of higher education. This neglect in official statistics is mirrored in the relative paucity of research literature on mature students generally in public sector higher education and part-time students in particular.

After surveying the research literature on mature students in British higher education Alan Woodley (1982) concluded that compared with the Open University and conventional universities very little work has been done in polytechnics and colleges of higher education. Recently, however, interest in continuing education has increased substantially on both sides of the higher education binary line as evidenced by major reports on 'continuing education' by both the National Advisory Body (NAB) and the University Grants Committee (UGC) in 1984. This concern is shared by the Council for National Academic Awards and one manifestation is this enquiry into students enrolled on CNAA part-time first degree courses.

The segments of higher education described by the terms 'continuing education', 'mature students' and 'part-time provision' are by no means synonymous. The overlap, however, is considerable and may be illustrated by the following figure:



Quantitatively, part-time students comprise the large majority of mature students in continuing education. They may reasonably be regarded as the kernel of both the 'mature student' and 'continuing education' categories.

Advocacy of the importance of part-time provision has been a recurring theme in statements on the role of the public sector of higher education since the 1960s. For example:

> "The academic range of the polytechnic should clearly be determined by the needs of part-time students rather than those of full-time students, for the part-time students have nowhere else to go." (Eric Robinson, Director of Lancashire Polytechnic in *The New Polytechnics*, Robinson, 1968)

> "Part-time courses should not be regarded as cheap and nasty alternatives to full-time education, nor as a sop to the mature student, nor as a means of providing cheap labour. I hold that the part-time route is not only valuable but essential, that it can, with proper and effective organisation, offer a worthwhile educational experience and that we should be seeking dignity not denigration in part-time provision." (From an address to a conference of part-time students organised by the NUS in 1975 by George Tolley when he was Principal of Sheffield City Polytechnic)

> "It is one of the special tasks of public sector higher education to explore the limits of access and to see how far it is possible to extend opportunities without sacrificing the quality of the education offered while maintaining the provision of personal and social and economic benefits ... The higher education system of the future, however, whatever its size and shape, must also provide for dispersed access. Not all students are mobile. Mature students and part-time students

typically need access to local institutions: and it is probably true that the non-traditional entrant is often more readily attracted to a local college than to a more distant institution. If we are serious about the extension of access, we must provide a system that meets the needs of such students." (page 74 in *Fitness for Purpose* by Christopher Ball, Chairman of the National Advisory Body for Public Sector Higher Education, 1985)

Despite its acknowledged importance, knowledge about part-time provision in the public sector of higher education remains very limited and the enquiry was designed to help fill this gap. Its primary focus is on the students (rather than on the courses or on the institutional settings) as this is the area where the available information is most limited.

The enquiry concentrated on part-time first degree courses. It was felt better to focus on one of the major segments of part-time provision that is fairly homogeneous than to attempt to cover a wider range of provision more superficially.

The sources of information were, at the outset of the project, expected to be CNAA records, DES records and Open University records supplemented by a questionnaire study of students currently enrolled on CNAA part-time first degree courses. The paucity of existing records on part-time students in higher education meant that greater reliance than expected had to be placed on primary data collection. For this purpose the main vehicle was a large-scale questionnaire survey of the part-time undergraduates.

In 1983 (the latest year for which data was available when the project was planned) there were 15,391 students enrolled on 266 CNAA part-time first degree courses encompassing over 40 subject areas. Many of these subjects had only one or two courses in operation and many were relatively new. By 1986 there were 18,365 students enrolled on 306 CNAA part-time first degree courses. 16 subjects accounted for over 80 per cent of the students and these were the subjects that were included in the questionnaire survey:

Subject group	Subject	Number of courses in 1982–83	Number of students in 1982–83
A. Arts and humanities	Art and design (inc. photography)	5	122
	Humanities	18	1,013
B. Social studies (inc. law)	Social science	10	535
	Law	13	1,158
C. Education	Education	43	3,865
D. Sciences	Biological sciences	9	435
	Chemistry	11	465
	Computer studies	8	460
	Mathematics	14	478
	Physics	10	269
E. Engineering/technology	Electrical/electronic engineering	11	521
	Mechanical engineering	12	457
	Engineering not elsewhere specified	10	386
	Materials studies	8	241
	Quantity surveying	5	514
F. Business studies	Business studies	20	1,792
Total		207	12,711

1.2 Scope of the enquiry

The enquiry encompassed three broad areas:

1. The characteristics (age, sex, marital status, socio-economic status, domestic responsibilities, previous education, sector of employment, etc) of students completing part-time first degree courses validated by the CNAA.
2. The experience of the students on their part-time degree programmes.
3. The performance of part-time undergraduates.

The questionnaire was distributed to 4,227 part-time undergraduates enrolled on 66 courses in 1985. Altogether 2,876 usable completed questionnaires were returned giving an overall response rate of almost 70 per cent. This is a high response rate for what was a long and detailed questionnaire.

It is a tribute to the respondents that they should have been willing to give up so much of their time for the prospect of improvements in part-time provision that could be expected to benefit not themselves but *future* generations of students.

Course teams might care to replicate some of the questions in the main questionnaire used for this study (available on request from CNAA Development Services) as

part of their own monitoring and evaluation exercises. In doing so they may find it helpful to compare their own results with those obtained from this enquiry.

In addition to results from the students' questionnaire, information was also drawn from a more unstructured questionnaire sent to the 66 course leaders.

Secondary sources of information included records from within the CNAA, data from the DES Further Education Statistical Record and Open University statistics.

Finally, the enquiry sought information on student non-completion. Neither DES nor CNAA records permitted an effective analysis of the structure of student non-completion of part-time undergraduates. Nor could the issue be adequately addressed by a simple questionnaire survey, as non-completion is a dynamic process which is not easily captured by the snapshot approach of the survey method. It was clear, however, that this is a most important issue. Very little is known about student non-completion on CNAA part-time first degree courses, where the issue is of particular importance as non-completion rates are believed to be high on such courses which are typically of five years' duration.

The solution was to include questions in the student questionnaire that previous research suggested might be important to this issue, with the prospect of subsequently recontacting the respondents to discover those who had withdrawn before completion. Information on the subsequent progress of all of the students in the survey was obtained one year after the original enquiry. By linking the results of this 'recontacting' exercise to the datafiles, it was possible both to analyse the structure of student non-completion and identify student and course characteristics systematically associated with non-completion.

2. The context

2.1 Part-time students in the polytechnics and colleges of higher education

The distribution of part-time undergraduates by sector of higher education is dominated by the Open University which accounts for over three quarters of the total. The public sector of higher education accounts for almost 20 per cent and the other universities account for less than five per cent.

The final column of the table shows that the rates of growth of numbers of part-timers have been similar in the public sector of higher education and in the Open University whereas within the other universities the growth has been relatively small. Consequently, both the public sector of higher education and the Open University have increased their shares at the expense of the percentage share of the other universities.

First degree students in the United Kingdom Higher Education by mode of study and sector. 1984

	Part-time	Full-time	Total	
	No.* (%)	No.* (%)	No.* (%)	% PT
Polytechnics and colleges	16 (18.4)	176 (41.5)	192 (37.6)	8.3
Open University	67 (77.0)	0 (0.0)	67 (13.1)	100.0
Other universities	4 (4.5)	248 (58.4)	252 (49.3)	1.6
Total	87 (100)	424 (100)	511 (100)	17.0

Source: Secretary of State for Education and Science 1985, Tables A2, A4 and A6
* thousands

The final column of this table shows for each sector the percentage of undergraduates who are part-time. Within the public sector part-time undergraduates still account for less than 10 per cent while for the other universities, overall, the figure is less than two per cent.

Although part-time provision of undergraduates has expanded greatly since the early 1970s the rates of growth in different sectors have varied greatly.

There has been a large increase in the number of part-time students undertaking advanced courses within the public sector of higher education since the early 1970s. The biggest percentage increase has occurred in undergraduate work and the smallest percentage increase has occurred in non-degree advanced work.

Part-time students in higher education, 1970–83. Great Britain

	1970	1983	% change 1970–83
	No.* (%)	No.* (%)	
Polytechnics and colleges	5.3 (17.9)	20.0 (19.7)	+275
Open University	19.6 (65.8)	76.1 (74.8)	+288
Other universities	4.9 (16.4)	5.6 (5.5)	+15
Total	29.8 (100)	101.7 (100)	+241

Source: Department of Education and Science 1985, Table 6
* thousands

The high rate of growth overall is partly, of course, a reflection of the low base level in 1970.

2.2 Growth of CNAA part-time degree course provision

The first part-time degree course to be approved by the

CNAA admitted its initial cohort of students in 1967. By 1985 CNAA part-time first degree courses numbered almost 300 with nearly 17,000 students enrolled. These numbers amount to 22 per cent of CNAA first degree courses and over 10 per cent of CNAA first degree students.

Growth of CNAA part-time first degree courses

	Academic year			
	1970–71	1974–75	1979–80	1984–85
Number of courses	24	91	208	294
Percentage increase over previous period	—	279%	128%	41%
Percentage increase over 1970–71	—	279%	767%	1125%

Source: CNAA Annual Reports

The DES discussion paper *Higher Education in the 1990s* asserted in 1978 that "there is little evidence of unsatisfied demand" for part-time advanced provision in the maintained sector (p.7). Between 1978 and 1984 the number of CNAA part-time undergraduate courses rose by over 50 per cent and the number of student enrolments rose by almost 70 per cent. If numbers enrolled are taken as an index of student demand it is remarkable that demand has grown at roughly the same rate as the number of available courses. The implication is that in this area the revealed demand for higher education follows the supply of courses.

Growth of CNAA part-time first degree student numbers

	Academic year			
	1970–71	1974–75	1979–80	1984–85
Number of students	1,042	3,823	11,427	16,820
Percentage increase over previous period	—	267%	199%	47%
Percentage increase over 1970–71	—	267%	997%	1,514%
Average first-year enrolment per course	22	21	22	22

Source: CNAA Annual Reports

2.3 Growth of part-time and full-time CNAA first degree courses compared

There has been an 11-fold increase in the number of CNAA part-time undergraduate *courses* since the beginning of the 1970s compared with a 3-fold increase in the number of full-time or sandwich undergraduate courses.

There has been a 15-fold increase in the number of CNAA part-time *undergraduates* since the beginning of the 1970s compared with a 5-fold increase in the number of full-time undergraduates.

At the start of the 1970s part-time courses accounted for eight per cent of all CNAA undergraduate courses. By the early 1980s the figure had risen to over 20 per cent.

Over the same time period the proportion of students enrolled on part-time first degree courses rose from under five per cent to over 10 per cent.

2.4 Distribution of the courses across institutions

Approximately half of the institutions associated with CNAA offer part-time first degree courses. The table overleaf shows the (grouped) distribution of the courses among the institutions.

Most (approximately 80 per cent) of the part-time degree courses are located in polytechnics. All of the polytechnics offer some part-time first degree courses (ranging from two to sixteen). Most of the other colleges offer none but there is one college (Humberside College of Higher Education) which offers ten.

The geographical distribution of the courses reflects their relative concentration within the polytechnics. The larger metropolitan districts are relatively well endowed with

CNAA part-time first degrees. Greater Manchester, Tyne and Wear, the West Midlands and especially Greater London are comparatively rich in this respect. Large areas of the UK, however, have none at all.

Number of CNAA part-time first degree courses offered by institutions with CNAA courses in 1985

Number of CNAA part-time courses	1	2	3–5	6–8	9–11	12–16	17+
Number of institutions	19	12	10	11	7	5	0

2.5 Distribution of part-time first degree courses by subject

Although the science and technology subject group has always accounted for the largest share of the part-time first degree provision in terms of course numbers the arts and social studies subject group is growing much faster than the others. This group now accounts for a quarter of all the courses and the science and technology group has fallen to less than 50 per cent of the total.

Part-time undergraduate provision in the polytechnics and colleges of higher education is still dominated by self-standing and subject-specific courses. This is illustrated by the fact that at the time of writing the 16 individual subjects that form the basis of this enquiry still accounted for over 80 per cent of the undergraduate part-time population. However, recent years have seen the development of multidisciplinary and mixed-mode courses. It is possible that these developments will become increasingly important in the future.

Subject distribution of CNAA part-time first degree courses

	Academic year			
	1970–71	1974–75	1979–80	1984–85
Science and technology	21	68	116	139
Arts and social studies	2	10	39	75
Business and management studies	1	4	16	23
Education	—	9	37	42
Art and design	—	—	—	9
Interdisciplinary courses	—	—	—	6
Total	24	91	208	294

Source: CNAA

3. Summary of the findings

3.1 The students

Personal details: The average (median) age of the respondents was 30. Almost two-third of them were male.

Most were married and in paid employment. Of those who were married, most had spouses in paid employment. Over 40 per cent of the respondents had children.

Most of the respondents reported that both parents had left school at the age of 15. In contrast with their parents, few of the respondents were engaged in manual occupations.

The findings of this study are consistent with a picture in which taking a CNAA part-time degree course is part of a process of upward social and economic mobility. There is also a suggestion in the findings that a significant proportion of the part-time students are in families in which continuing education is perceived as a route to enhanced economic life chances and that the students were continuing a process of upward socio-economic mobility started by their parents.

Employment profile: Overall, a disproportionately large share of the respondents were employed in the public sector. Of those employed in the private sector, manufacturing industry was over-represented and the service sector was under-represented. Large organisations employed a disproportionately large percentage of the students.

Most of the students reported records of employment stability. Less than 10 per cent had changed job (employer) more than once in the five years before starting their part-time degree course. Less than 10 per cent had changed their employer since starting their courses.

Over 30 per cent of the respondents reported that they were members of a professional body or institute.

Educational background: A majority had left school at the age of 17 or younger. Indeed, almost half left school at the age of 16 or younger. Many of those who had left school at an early age had proceeded to some form of other full-time study. Nevertheless, a sizeable 38 per cent had completed their initial full-time education at the age of 17 or less.

Apart from those who proceeded *directly* to some other form of full-time study on leaving school another sizeable group reported that they had subsequently undertaken some form of full-time study. Together, these two groups comprised 47 per cent of the respondents. However, 18 per cent had started but not finished such courses.

Almost two-thirds of the respondents had undertaken some form of part-time study before enrolling on their CNAA part-time degree course. For most of them this experience had been relatively recent.

Part-time day-release and evening classes were by far the most commonly encountered forms of previous part-time study.

Previous study at the same college seems to be a significant route onto part-time degree courses. Over 30 per cent of the students had experience of previous study at the same college.

Overall, the findings give a picture of a population of part-time students in which the average school leaving age is low but with a fairly high incidence of post-school full-time education (often not completed) and extensive part-time education.

Entry qualifications: The findings on the highest educational qualification previously attained revealed great diversity in entry qualifications but with the majority having already attained a relatively high educational level. In general, the part-time students hold higher qualifications at entry than mature full-time students. The most common entry qualifications were BTEC Higher awards (or equivalent). Less than one per cent held Open University credits.

From one perspective, it appears that part-time degrees are playing a significant role in enabling those who are already well-educated to engage in further continuing education. From another perspective, it may suggest that admissions tutors are unduly conservative in their admissions policies.

There is a substantial variation across subject groups in the proportions of part-time undergraduates with non-standard entry qualifications. Arts and humanities, social sciences and business studies all have above average proportions of students with non-standard entry qualifications. Arts and humanities and social studies also have higher than average proportions of students with particularly *high* entry qualifications.

Comparisons with Open University: The proportion of students not holding the conventional 'minimum entry qualifications' for a degree level course is lower among the CNAA part-time undergraduates (13 per cent) than among Open University students (37 per cent).

Compared to the Open University undergraduate courses CNAA part-time provision is more concentrated in the areas of business/management studies, education and technology as opposed to science, arts and the social sciences. On balance, the range of courses being pursued by CNAA part-time undergraduates is more vocationally orientated than is the range of Open University undergraduate programmes.

Compared to the Open University students the CNAA part-time degree respondents contained a higher proportion who were male and a higher proportion who were younger.

The Open University undergraduate population contains a higher proportion of housewives and those who, for various reasons, are not working. By contrast, the CNAA part-time degree population contains a higher proportion of administrators and managers and technical personnel.

3.2 Institutional perspectives

The contents of this section were obtained from the responses to a questionnaire distributed to the course leaders of the 66 courses whose students were being surveyed. The purpose of this questionnaire was to identify the patterns of provision, and the range of special facilities available, for the part-time undergraduates. The response rate was over 80 per cent.

In interpreting the findings it is necessary to bear in mind that there are different kinds of courses on offer and that they are intended for very different kinds of client groups.

Access: Access courses with specific links to the part-time degree courses are growing, though not at a remarkable speed. As yet there are only about 15 per cent of the courses with an 'access or preparatory' course associated with the undergraduate programme.

About half of the courses sampled pointed to an associate student scheme or other kinds of opportunities for students to sample courses without enrolling for a qualification. In about half of those cases it was possible for students who then wished to transfer to the course itself to be credited with their success as associate students. The associate student path, on this evidence, appears to offer a more useful route into part-time higher education than is often appreciated.

Admission with advanced standing: About half of the institutional respondents claimed to offer the opportunity for admission with advanced standing. However, CNAA figures suggest that the actual numbers admitted with advanced standing is very small. For those who offer the possibility of admission with advanced standing, traditional methods of assessment for admission were normally employed.

Interviews: Very heavy reliance is placed on the interview in the selection process, especially for those courses not building on a specific platform of entry qualifications. About 20 per cent of the respondents had a policy of interviewing *all* applicants irrespective of their entry qualifications.

Application forms: Nearly half of the responding course leaders indicated that the application form used was no different from that used for full-time courses. It would seem that many part-time applicants are being asked to complete a long application form which was designed for completion by younger applicants to full-time courses.

Where specially designed application forms are used for the part-time courses there is wide variation in size and visual attractiveness. There is also wide variation in the information sought. The application forms that were available from the course leaders covered altogether 72 *different* items, indicating little consensus as to the information needed from part-time applicants.

Induction: There is great variety in the provision of induction to the courses and institutions ranging from one course (building on a BTEC course provided at the same institution) with no induction programme to one course that integrated induction into a first year half-credit study skills course. Some courses provided brief induction programmes over a single day (24 per cent) whereas others (26 per cent) put on a range of events lasting from more than one day to up to a week.

Information for students: The most common form of providing information to new students was some form of course guide. Course guides ranged from a 6-page A5 leaflet to a 50-page A4 booklet giving much detail of the elements of the course, the place of the course within the structure of the institution, a 'who's who' of the staff associated with the course, and a set of notes on study skills. However, on the evidence of this survey, it would appear that some students on part-time degree courses are not being made properly aware of the 'nature and methods of assessment, and all other relevant assessment requirements and regulations' as intended in CNAA's Principle 7.2.

Other strategies for providing information to new students included presentations on study skills, a meeting with former students and providing students with past examination papers. For a few courses, 'induction' was perceived as a continuing process with residential weekends and summer schools seen as helpful.

Special provision for part-time students: Some course teams appear to believe that the part-time undergraduates should, as far as practicable, be integrated with the full-time students and this view was manifest in common induction programmes and common formal classes. On the other hand, some course teams feel that the needs of part-time students are very different and that they require particular provision.

Teaching/learning methods: So far as special teaching methods for the part-time students were concerned there were two main strategies. Firstly, particular support was given through the provision of more handouts or duplicated notes than those provided to the full-time students. Secondly, ways were found of drawing on the experience of the part-time students within the course. This included setting mini-projects to complete in the work situation, greater use of video, extended essays, case studies, specially written coursework and learning packs, computer-assisted learning, independent study and distance learning.

The general picture is of occasional courses being particularly adventurous by experimenting with a wide variety of teaching methods to enable the part-time students to take a more active role in their own learning, a majority of courses who feel the need to pay attention to the particular needs of the part-time students but with a limited repertoire of special teaching/learning methods, and a significant minority who are not convinced that the part-time students have needs that require a different range of teaching/learning methods than those provided for the full-time students.

Assessment: Patterns of assessment showed even less recognition of the students' part-time mode of study. Amongst the particular methods employed, in descending order of use, were relatively greater use of continuous assessment, importance of project, open-book or previously seen examinations, work-based assessments, case

studies, negotiated assessment and (for one course) self-assessment. In addition, flexible deadlines for handing in assessed work and the ability to stretch the duration of taught courses (so that in turn the dates of formal assessments could be altered) were also reported.

Transfer opportunities: Opportunities to transfer to a corresponding full-time course were limited to just over half of the courses of the respondents. For a third of the courses the course leader considered that the full-time course was essential to the continued existence of the part-time course.

Counselling: Almost half of the course leaders pointed to the institution's central counselling service as available to the part-time students. All but two of the courses offered advice and counselling services to students by staff on the course in addition to any provided by the institution's central counselling service. No mention, however, was made of any of the course staff having any training or staff development for that role.

Library provision: For all but two of the courses the library was open until at least 8.30 pm for four days of the week. A third enjoyed some library facilities on the weekend.

Some institutions show an appreciation, in their library regulations, that part-time students are not always able to gain access to the library and turn round books as quickly as their full-time counterparts. A fifth of the courses reported an extended 'short loan' service for the part-time students. Other services mentioned as being provided specially for part-time students were appropriate staff being on duty for evening courses, extended borrowing periods, provision of special bookstock for use by part-time students, a postal service and telephone reservations.

Refectory: Over three-quarters of the institutions had canteens or refectories open until 6.30 pm and a quarter were open after 6.30 pm. In nearly a quarter of the institutions, however, students either had only machines to meet their needs for food or drinks, or – in the case of three courses – had no such facilities of any kind.

Resource constraints: 60 per cent of the course leaders identified areas where resource constraints in recent years had impacted on the facilities for the students on their courses. Four main areas were mentioned: staff resources (eg, reduced team teaching and loss of visiting lecturers), limits on student intake numbers, reduced support services and physical resources.

Course review: In all but two courses, some formal means was provided by which students could participate in the control and monitoring of the course. This usually meant representation on the course board or committee. The involvement of the students in course evaluation, however, was explicitly mentioned by only a small minority of the course leaders.

Student cohesion: Course leaders seem to split about 50/50 over whether they feel responsibilities for promoting social interaction with and among the students. Strongly evident in this split was a divide between subject areas. Those who do not seek to promote such social interaction were almost all found in the sciences and engineering/technology. In the social sciences and humanities course leaders mentioned various ways of developing social identity among the students within the course itself in group work, on residential weekends, via summer schools and on field trips.

Study skills: The subject divide (broadly science and non-science) also emerged in relation to study skills. Provision for the development of study skills was mostly found outside of the sciences and engineering/technology. Sometimes the study skills provision was under the direction of the library or the institution's educational development unit. It took many forms from programmes of various duration (one-day to a full two-term course unit) to self-learning packs and other forms of handouts.

Non-completion: Most of the course leaders were very aware of non-completion as an issue to which effort needed to be directed. Only 20 per cent were unable to point to any special procedures or practices designed to lessen non-completion. These largely fell into four categories: flexibility in terms of course structure, flexibility in terms of assessment procedures, measures to ensure that new students are well-informed about the course and the exercise by staff of a collective responsibility for monitoring student attendance and progress.

Financial support for students: For over half of the courses there exists some kind of 'hardship' fund for students who encounter difficulty with their fees. Only two course leaders indicated the option of a 'payment by instalment' scheme.

CNAA: The course leaders perceived the following areas of CNAA policy or practices as needing particular review in relation to part-time courses: CNAA entry requirements for mature students, class contact hours and fees.

3.3 The decision to enrol

Main aim: Improvement in career prospects was by far the most important aim reported by the respondents to the students' questionnaire. It was selected as the "Main aim" by more than three times the number of respondents who selected the next most popular main aim which was to "prove to myself (or others) that I could complete a degree course". Over three-quarters of the respondents rated "to improve my career prospects" as a "very important" aim. As a broad generalisation, work-related aims were regarded as most important followed by personal development aims and subject-related aims with other aims as less important.

Almost half of the respondents reported that they will use their CNAA degree qualification to "join, obtain exemption from or gain higher status in a professional body" relevant to their career/occupation. 40 per cent envisaged undertaking further study for the examinations of a professional body.

Academic aims: A substantial proportion of the respondents envisaged continuing to higher level academic study: 35 per cent in the case of taught Master's degrees and 23 per cent in the case of research degrees.

A *majority* of respondents expressed positive interest in proceeding to further part-time study for a postgraduate award in a similar field of study if this were possible at the college at which they were currently enrolled.

Information: Among the respondents to the questionnaire the single most common first source of information about their CNAA part-time degree courses was the college prospectus. Presumably most of these would have been student initiated enquiries.

Of the formal information channels only the local press accounted for a substantial percentage of responses. Information about the availability of part-time degree courses seems to be heavily dependent upon the efficacy of informal channels (such as colleagues at work).

About three-quarters of the respondents were unaware of the existence of their course for more than two years before they enrolled. This would appear to be further evidence of a lack of general awareness of the availability of part-time degree courses within the polytechnics and other colleges of higher education.

Barriers to access: The questionnaire sought the views of the part-time students on potential barriers to access to part-time degree courses. "Lack of availability of suitable part-time degree courses at a reasonable distance" was regarded as the most important barrier. This may, of course, partially reflect a lack of awareness of the number and range of part-time degree courses that are in fact available.

Little discouragement from taking a part-time degree course was reported. Most encouragement was drawn from the students' families and other members of the course (staff and fellow students).

Choices: The reasons given by the students for choice of the particular course at the particular institution stressed the practical rather than the academic. This suggested the following broad generalisation: improving the attractiveness and general level of enrolments on part-time degree courses is firstly a matter of making them more widely available and more widely known and only then a matter of achieving excellence in terms of course content. The latter is, however, important in *retaining* students after they have enrolled.

The reason for choosing a CNAA part-time degree course rather than an Open University course that was most frequently mentioned (by almost 80 per cent of the respondents) was face-to-face tuition. This was also the reason the largest number of respondents reported as "most important". The next most popular responses were greater contact with staff and fellow students. For 50 per cent of the respondents the availability of on-site facilities (libraries, computers, etc) was an important reason.

16 per cent mentioned the higher cost of Open University courses as a reason for choosing a CNAA part-time degree course. Less than one per cent mentioned inability to get a place on an Open University course.

3.4 Students' experiences

Applications and admissions: Most (71 per cent) of the survey respondents attended an interview for their course.

60 per cent of the respondents regarded the information that they received before starting their course as "very good" or "fairly good". Almost 10 per cent regarded it as "fairly poor" or "very poor".

Few courses administer any form of test of written or quantitative skills to candidates for admission. Only eight per cent of the respondents encountered such a test.

Almost two-thirds of the respondents were unaware of having received guidance on study skills when they started their courses.

Hours of attendance and private study: The average (median) hours of required course attendance per week was six (mean = 7.7) and the average number of additional hours per week that the respondents spent in private study was nine.

Almost 80 per cent of the respondents were satisfied with the balance between class attendance and private study. Of the remainder, most would prefer a shift in the balance towards more class attendance.

There was a wide variation in the weekly number of hours spent in formal lectures. Overall, about three-quarters of the class contact of the respondents took the form of lectures. Over three-quarters of the respondents thought that the present balance between lectures and the other forms of class contact is "about right". Of the remainder, most would prefer a shift in the balance towards fewer formal lectures. Small groupwork with tutor present and independent work (eg project work) was regarded as both helpful and enjoyable. Lectures and preparation of written work were perceived as helpful though not especially enjoyable. Practical work was popular but ranked less highly in terms of helpfulness. Only a small percentage of the students regarded programmed learning as either enjoyable or helpful.

Subject loading: The average (median) number of different subjects that the respondents were currently studying was three but there were some examples of students carrying six or more subjects at the same time. This prompts the question of whether 'intensive teaching' of fewer subjects over shorter time periods has a contribution to make to part-time degree courses.

Distance learning: Half of the students expressed some level of positive interest in the possibility of studying some course units by distance learning. This implies, of course, that the idea was unattractive to the other half of the respondents. There would appear to be a case for some experimentation with this idea but as an option rather than as a compulsory replacement for some face-to-face tuition.

Assessment: On average, coursework accounted for almost 30 per cent of the total student assessment. A majority (52 per cent) of the respondents would prefer

coursework to have a larger role in assessment and only five per cent would prefer it to have a smaller role in assessment.

Academic and other support: 47 per cent of the respondents reported that for all subjects the course provides academic support for students subject to unavoidable absences, 38 per cent reported such support for some subjects only leaving 15 per cent without any such support.

80 per cent of the respondents had a personal tutor "from whom they could seek advice about difficulties".

Almost two-thirds of the respondents believed that they were not members of the student union at their college or were unaware of whether they were or not.

3.5 Student assessment of their courses and student difficulties

Overall assessment: For over 90 per cent of the respondents their CNAA part-time degree courses were rated as "roughly as expected" or "better than expected". A similar percentage would recommend their course to a friend in a similar position to themselves when they started.

Very high levels of satisfaction were expressed with the relationships between staff and students, course content and the helpfulness of the staff. In general the students expressed a higher level of overall satisfaction with the courses than with the college facilities.

Specific strengths and weaknesses: The elements of the courses that provided least satisfaction were the arrangements for students to make their voices heard in course evaluation, feedback to students on their performance/progress and opportunities to vary the pace of their studies.

The respondents expressed high levels of satisfaction with library opening hours and library loan regulations but less satisfaction with the *availability* of books and journals recommended by staff.

The two factors that produced the highest proportions of dissatisfied respondents were refectory/canteen facilities and pre-school child care facilities. Interpretation of the latter factor is difficult, however, as it was inapplicable to a large proportion of the respondents.

Perceived standards: Three-quarters of the respondents thought that CNAA part-time degree courses are of equivalent standard to CNAA full-time degree courses. Of the remainder, a majority thought that the part-time degree courses are of a higher standard. However, they felt less confident about the perceptions of others. Overall, they thought that their employers were less inclined to rate the relative standard of their CNAA part-time degree courses as highly as they did themselves and they were even less optimistic about the perceptions of academics in other institutions of higher education. This is significant in the light of the finding that a substantial proportion of the students planned to engage in further study after their undergraduate programmes.

Student difficulties: For about three-quarters of the students the difficulties, overall, had been roughly as expected when they enrolled. Of the remainder most had experienced greater difficulties than expected.

A majority of the respondents had experienced more difficulty in finding the time to study than they had expected. Most of these perceived this as a problem of time management ("organising my time in an efficient way").

Coping with the stress of examinations and developing appropriate study skills had proved more difficult than expected for more than 20 per cent of the respondents.

A substantial proportion of the respondents reported that coping with the competing demands of family, job and "other interests" had been more difficult than expected. Almost 40 per cent said that a change in their job responsibilities had increased their difficulties and for almost 20 per cent changes in family responsibilities accounted for increased difficulties. Moving house was also identified as a factor that increased the difficulties of a substantial proportion of the students (18 per cent).

A majority of the respondents had had to miss classes because of work commitments and almost half reported that they had been unable to complete required reading or coursework because of work requirements.

Over 30 per cent of the respondents had missed some classes because of domestic commitments and about a third reported that they had been unable to complete required reading or coursework because of domestic commitments.

Travel: Approximately half of the respondents spent more than two hours per week travelling to attend classes – this does not include any additional journeys to make use of other college facilities such as the library. The median distance from home to college was 10 miles (the mean was 16 miles). Almost a quarter live more than 20 miles from the college.

Finances: About 60 per cent of the students who completed the questionnaire said that they received some form of financial support for their part-time studies. Most of this support came from employers. Most of the minority who had sought assistance from local (or central) government had been unsuccessful.

Only 20 per cent reported that they were experiencing difficulty with the financial costs of their course. However, the enquiry found that for those that do experience such difficulty this is an important element in the likelihood of completing their course.

3.6 Some further issues in course development

Intermediate awards: 14 per cent of the respondents said that their courses provided for some form of intermediate award. Of these, 80 per cent said that they attached at

least some importance to it and over a third saw it as "very important". Of the respondents on courses that did not provide for intermediate awards most (68 per cent) thought the introduction of such an award would have a positive impact on the attractiveness of their course and over a third thought that it would make their course "much more attractive".

Patterns of attendance: Approximately one-third of the respondents reported that their course involved some form of 'block attendance' such as weekend school.

About two-thirds of the students expressed some level of positive interest in the possibility of completing the final stage of their degree course by full-time study. About one-third expressed a high level of positive interest.

Classes with full-time students: Overall, 23 per cent of the respondents had attended classes on their courses at which full-time students were also present. The incidence of mixed mode classes appears to rise from the first to the last years of the courses.

On balance, there was support among the respondents for the suggestion that full-time students join the part-time students for some classes. 60 per cent were amenable to the suggestion compared to 30 per cent who found the idea unattractive. As for the stronger feelings, over 20 per cent said that they would welcome it compared with only five per cent who would object strongly.

3.7 Student performance

Honours and non-honours degrees: The majority of CNAA part-time undergraduates complete non-honours courses whereas most of the full-time students complete honours courses.

The subjects with a relatively high proportion of part-time undergraduates completing honours courses include the social sciences, arts and humanities and business studies. Engineering/technology subjects have relatively few of the part-time undergraduates completing honours courses.

Commendations: On non-honours degree programmes a higher proportion of the part-time students than full-time students obtained commendations. This is not an aggregation phenomenon as it is also true of most of the subjects separately identified. In almost half of the subjects where the number of graduates was sufficiently large to permit the subjects to be separately identified the proportion of commendations awarded to the part-time students exceeded the proportion of commendations awarded to the full-time students by a ratio of more than three to one. The part-time students who have a relatively high likelihood of achieving a commendation on a non-honours course are found in those subjects where a small proportion of the part-time students complete honours degrees. This suggests that there may be significant numbers of students on non-honours courses who would be perfectly capable of achieving high honours if part-time honours degree courses were more available in the subjects that they wish to study.

High honours: The proportion of honours graduates awarded 'good' degrees was higher for the part-time students than for the full-time students. Moreover, this conclusion also held in every case where graduate numbers were sufficiently large for individual subjects to be separately identified.

3.8 Non-completion

One year after the original questionnaire almost two-thirds of the original respondents were still enrolled and over one-fifth had successfully completed their courses. Three per cent had failed and one per cent had left with an intermediate award.

The non-completion rate was much higher for the respondents in the first year of their courses than for those in subsequent years. In general, the more years that students had been enrolled the smaller the proportion that withdrew without any form of award.

The level of non-completion is much higher for students on longer courses (four years or more) than for shorter courses (three years or less). For example, the proportion of *first year* students who either failed or withdrew without any form of award was 27 per cent for the longer courses compared with only six per cent for the shorter courses.

Non-completion rates are likely to be particularly high during the early life of a course. It is at this stage that there is greatest need for support and assistance to course teams in dealing with the problem of non-completion.

Factors associated with non-completion: The enquiry identified a wide range of variables associated with first year non-completion. Some of these reflected factors that related to the structure or practices of courses (or colleges). Some reflected characteristics of the students that are identifiable at enrolment. The remainder reflected, for the most part, the experience of students since enrolment.

Higher than average first year rates of non-completion were recorded for the following:

- those with no previous experience of part-time education;
- those attending on the basis of evenings only;
- those for whom the course had failed to meet their expectations. In particular those who were dissatisfied with the following factors:
  - relationships between staff and students
  - library loan regulations
  - refectory/canteen facilities
  - appreciation by staff of the difficulties of part-time study
  - the pre-course information that they received;
- those who had already considered leaving the course;
- those whose courses necessitated a high number of journeys to college per week;

- those who were favourably disposed to completing one or more units of their course by distance learning;
- those who regarded "lack of provision by colleges of preparatory back-to-study courses" as an important barrier to access to part-time degree courses;
- those who regarded the presence of an intermediate qualification on their course as "very important";
- those for whom the ability to join the course despite "lack of qualifications" was an important factor in their choice of course/institution;
- those whose highest educational qualification gained while at school was below GCE 'O' level;
- those whose highest educational qualification at enrolment was below GCE 'A' level standard;
- those who completed their full-time education at an age of over 21;
- those who reported that the level of the qualification was an unimportant factor in their choice of course/institution;
- those whose main aim when enrolling was to increase job-changing opportunities;
- those engaged in manual occupations;
- those who were unemployed;
- those who had more than one spell of unemployment in the five years before starting their course;
- those in a low income bracket;
- those for whom the course was entirely self-financed;
- those who had encountered difficulties meeting the financial costs of the course;
- those whose weekly travel time per week to/from college was six hours or more;
- those whose normal mode of transport to college is other than by car;
- those who were not married (ie, those who were single, separated, divorced or widowed);
- those who had doubts about the reputation of the academic standard of a CNAA part-time degree compared to a CNAA full-time degree;
- those for whom the difficulties overall were greater than they expected when they decided to enrol. In particular those who encountered greater than expected difficulties with the following:

  time management

  coping with the stress of examinations

  coping with the financial cost of the course

  coping with travel to and from college

  keeping up with the academic level of the course

  coping with job demands;
- those who had encountered greater than expected difficulties with a change of address, a change of employer or a change in their state of health;
- those who had missed classes due to domestic or work commitments; and
- those who expressed a preference for more formal lectures rather than other forms of class contact and a preference for more class attendance rather than private study.

Lower than average first year rates of non-completion were recorded for the following respondents:

- those who had attended a residential (eg weekend school) on their course;
- those who first heard about their course from someone currently or previously enrolled on the course;
- those who first heard about their course from their employer;
- those who attached importance in their choice of course/institution to the fact that "spouse/friends etc" were already taking the course;
- those who enrolled on a CNAA part-time degree course rather than an Open University course because of the reputation or recommendation of the former;
- those who expressed a high level of satisfaction with the following factors:

  availability in library of books and journals recommended by staff

  library loan regulations

  appreciation by staff of the difficulties of part-time study;
- those who found independent work particularly helpful;
- those who had studied at the same college before;
- those who rated the following objectives in enrolling for their course as "very important":

  to make new friends with similar interests

  to improve prospects for increased salary/promotion in present work

  to help me do my present job better

  to prove to myself (or others) that I could complete a degree course;
- those who had known about the existence of their course for two years or more before enrolling;
- those with a higher education entry qualification below degree level (teaching qualification or HNC);
- those married students with spouses who had undertaken a course of part-time education;
- those employed as teachers or technical personnel;
- those employed in the public sector;
- those who had been with their current employer for at least three years;
- those who received encouragement from their employer to undertake their course. In particular, those receiving tangible employer support of the following kinds:

  employer pays or refunds all of the course fees

employer makes an allowance for travelling

employer gives time off with pay to attend classes;

— those who reported the following people as very supportive: spouse/partner, employer, college staff or fellow students.

On the evidence of this survey there would appear to be no simple solution to the problem of non-completion other than that of recruiting only those applicants in the 'low risk' categories. This, of course, is unlikely to commend itself to many course teams as it undermines the aspirations that prompted the development of the part-time degree courses.

Counselling needs: A more acceptable approach would be to place more emphasis on pre-enrolment counselling of applicants in the 'high risk' categories. This project should be helpful in identifying the 'high risk' categories as an aid to such counselling.

All applicants should be made aware of the difficulties that they are likely to encounter in completing part-time undergraduate programmes. Again, the factors identified above should be helpful in identifying these difficulties.

Course review: The findings presented above should also be useful in suggesting some modifications to courses that can be helpful in reducing non-completion. These are picked up in the recommendations in the next section.

Non-completion as a performance indicator: Non-completion is very important but while its use as a general performance indicator can encourage some practices that are commendable it can also encourage undesirable practices and attitudes (including, for example, restrictive entry policies and a reluctance to introduce intermediate awards). High rates of non-completion usually produce difficulties for those administering part-time degree courses (particularly at the advanced stages) and this itself is a discipline. The evidence from the course leaders' questionnaire showed a high level of awareness of the problem of non-completion. On the evidence of this enquiry part-time degree courses with high rates of non-completion generally need help more than censure.

It seems likely that non-completion is often underestimated when courses are first developed and that the experience with running courses leads to various small changes that effect gradual reductions in the context of specific courses. It would clearly be helpful if mechanisms could be developed to facilitate sharing among courses of experience in coping with non-completion. The next section suggests ways that the CNAA could assist with this.

4. Conclusions and recommendations

4.1 Publicity and recruitment

Part-time degree courses in the polytechnics and colleges of higher education are a significant national asset. However, their growth and success have received little recognition or promotion. Increasing the number of enrolments on these courses is firstly a matter of making these courses more widely available and more widely known.

The scale of part-time degree course provision nationally within the polytechnics and colleges of higher education has now reached a level where there is a prima-facie case for some central initiative in disseminating information. This would not, of course, eliminate the need for local recruitment efforts at the course level but it would probably have a significant impact on the effectiveness of those efforts. Relatively low student enrolment on many part-time degree courses suggests that more concerted advertising of these courses would produce more efficient utilisation of the resources that are committed to them.

Most professional bodies have an interest in education and offer a potentially cost effective medium through which to make contact with potential students. It is possible that professional bodies would be willing to include information on the availability of relevant part-time degree courses via newsletters and the other ways by which they communicate with their members. In addition, course leaders in a particular subject might consider combining together to support display advertisements listing the available relevant part-time degree courses in the journals of the relevant professional bodies. The full report of this project identifies the main relevant professional bodies if this suggestion is pursued.

About 90 per cent of the respondents to the students' questionnaire said "yes" to the question "Would you recommend this course to a friend in a similar position to yourself when you started?" Courses with low levels of recruitment should bear this finding in mind. The existing students and graduates are potentially powerful agents of recruitment.

4.2 Access courses and associate student schemes

Mounting an access course or securing an interface with another institution is a much more daunting task than developing and operating an associate student scheme. Those institutions without an associate student scheme should give careful thought to the development of this route into higher education.

4.3 Admissions

The findings of this enquiry suggest that, overall, admissions tutors on part-time degree courses may be unduly conservative in their admissions policies. Some might consider the value of tests combined with less demanding requirements in terms of conventional entry qualifications. Until effective methods of evaluating experiential learning have been identified (the object of another project being undertaken under the sponsorship of CNAA Development Services) this could provide a more flexible admissions policy whilst still preserving the security required by many courses.

Even when courses are enabled to make more use of the opportunities to enrol students with non-standard entry qualifications and, in particular, to give credit for experiential learning (*see Evans, 1984*) in entry criteria there will still be a need to disseminate awareness of this to those who might be potential students.

4.4 Application forms

The key criterion for any application form is: is it likely to encourage applicants to present themselves as well as possible and also provide a basis for an informed decision about the applicant? Candidates should be encouraged to identify their accomplishments (whether at work or elsewhere) and outline their aspirations for themselves. It is undesirable to ask part-time applicants to complete application forms designed for younger applicants of full-time courses. There would appear to be much merit in an institution producing its own 'core' application form for use across all its part-time courses. The Appendix provides a suggested 'core' form. Individual courses might then append a sheet asking for any further information that is required for the specific needs of the course.

4.5 Admissions interviews

71 per cent of the survey respondents attended an interview for their course. An admissions interview can take the form of educational counselling in which the needs of the applicant are explored to assess whether the course is the most appropriate one to meet those needs. This is clearly most important for those applicants in the 'high risk' categories identified in the section on non-completion. An interview that included admissions counselling of this kind would seem to be one means of reducing unnecessary non-completion by students. In view of this it may seem surprising that almost 30 per cent of the respondents attended no interview and it is difficult to resist the feeling that some courses are losing an opportunity here.

Almost 40 per cent of the respondents claim not to have considered an Open University course when they applied for their CNAA part-time degree course. This is a disturbingly high figure and one might have hoped that all applicants to CNAA part-time degree courses would be encouraged to consider the alternatives in order to identify the course of higher education that most meets their needs. An admissions interview is an appropriate place for this sort of educational counselling.

Interviews are often used for imparting information to candidates as well as assessing the suitability of a candi-

date for a place on a course. The information is usually imparted orally some time before admission to a course and the students are interacting with the institution in the role of applicant. It might be helpful to distinguish between information that the applicant needs to assist in the decision about whether to accept an offer of a place on a course and that which might be more accurately described as induction information. The latter type of information is best conveyed outside of admissions interviews. Some courses arrange for additional interactions with groups of new students where information about the course and institution is made available. Other courses might like to consider this approach.

4.6 Information to new students

It is easier to provide information to students on some matters than on others. Informing students of the amount of required class attendance is relatively easy. Providing information on the level of academic difficulty of a course is more difficult. It should, however, be possible to give students a reasonable appreciation of the teaching methods that they can expect and it should be possible in an interview situation to provide a fair indication of the amount of required private study. In fact, this is just the sort of information that is best conveyed in an interview.

At an early stage students should be made properly aware of the 'nature and methods of assessment, and all other relevant requirements and regulations' as intended in CNAA's Principle 7.2.

The development of a 'core' document by an institution to which individual courses can append departmental and course specific information might be considered as an effective means of providing institutional and course information while offering resource savings to the institution.

4.7 Student awareness of likely difficulties

The admissions interview would also seem to be an appropriate vehicle for exploring with the prospective student expected difficulties. Certainly it would seem to be important, at some stage in the admissions process, for staff to emphasize to students the difficulties that they are likely to encounter.

Over half of the students surveyed encountered more difficulty finding the time to study than they had expected when they enrolled. Almost 40 per cent perceived this as a problem of time management. For others it may be a question of being made more aware of the required level of weekly time commitment needed to complete the course and being encouraged to work carefully through their priorities to discover where the time can be found. An admissions interview would seem to be an appropriate place to start this process and it would seem sensible to spend some time of any induction programme addressing this issue.

Difficulties associated with domestic commitments were often more than expected and applicants should be encouraged at an early stage to discuss the level of commitment necessary to complete a part-time degree level course with their family to ensure that this really is appreciated.

A further important factor impacting on non-completion was financial difficulty. Hopefully, the information obtained by this enquiry will prove useful to those involved in the admissions process in helping applicants to appreciate realistically the likely financial impact of undertaking part-time undergraduate studies.

4.8 Study skills

Helping students to learn how to learn is an important objective for courses of education at all levels. Facts become outdated but learning how to learn more effectively benefits students for the rest of their lives. The development of study skills is one significant element of this.

For those without experience of study since their last full-time course insecurity about 'rusty' study skills is a significant problem. Developing appropriate study skills and coping with the stress of examinations each proved more difficult for more than 20 per cent of the respondents. There seems to be a strong case for explicitly addressing the issue of study skills at the outset of all part-time degree courses.

One CNAA part-time undergraduate course starts with a residential weekend for new students orientated towards developing study skills and time management skills and also has a Saturday morning workshop on 'coping with examinations' about a month before the students take their first examinations. This also, of course, helps to develop social cohesion among the students with its additional educational benefits. Course teams might wish to consider this as an example of good practice.

Sometimes the development of study skills is under the direction of the library staff or the institution's educational development service. These central services are unlikely to be sufficient by themselves: the study skills required of students vary across subjects and in relation to the course objectives.

Some staff involved in operating part-time degree courses may, as subject specialists, not feel confident about providing such workshops. Where this is the case they might consider using available videos that address these issues and they might also consider what help can be sought within their institution from their own educational development units, counselling services or departments of education.

4.9 Course flexibility

One of the areas of the courses that afforded least satisfaction to the students in the survey was the opportunity to vary the pace of their studies. Course structures that are flexible in this way, however, tend to be more resource intensive than simple but inflexible structures. Nevertheless, course teams might wish to direct their attention to this issue.

4.10 Course tranfers

Since, at most institutions, part-time degree courses exist alongside corresponding full-time degree courses arrangements could be made to facilitate transfers. This may require better communication between the two modes than exists in some colleges. And, of course, students would need to be made aware of these arrangements. In the case of sandwich degree courses it may also require more flexibility by the CNAA in exempting part-time students with work experience from the requirements of the sandwich placement.

4.11 Intermediate awards

Considerable difficulties confront the student in sustaining high level study over the necessarily long duration of a part-time degree course. Domestic and professional circumstances can change in unpredictable ways so that the probability of successful completion cannot be so high as for full-time students. It is therefore desirable that the part-time students perceive objectives that are realistically attainable in their not too distant futures. Moreover, it is also desirable to make provisions that allow for the students to adjust their objectives as the course progresses.

Some potential students are unsure of their capacity to complete a full degree course. Such students are likely to draw confidence from the presence of an intermediate award for the successful completion of the initial stages of the degree course. On the evidence of this survey the large majority of part-time undergraduates favour the availability of an intermediate award.

The impact of intermediate certification on student numbers is unclear. It is likely to increase enrolments but insofar as some students will leave with the intermediate award it is also likely to reduce the proportion of entrants who complete the full degree programme. It is difficult to see, however, how it could not be in the students' interests. In view of this and as it is not difficult to introduce it is recommended for the consideration of courses and colleges.

4.12 Honours courses

In those subjects where most of the part-time students are enrolled on non-honours courses, a high proportion of the students achieve commendations. This suggests that there may be a substantial number of students on the courses who would be perfectly capable of achieving good honours degrees if part-time honours degrees were more available in these subjects.

4.13 Intensive teaching

There is evidence from the survey of part-time students concurrently studying what may appear to be an unreasonably large number of different subjects. Would it not be better, in some cases, to teach fewer subjects in parallel and teach more subjects in series? For example, instead of teaching four subjects in parallel over a whole year perhaps it would be worth considering the desirability of teaching two subjects more intensively for one semester each. By reducing the range of subjects with which the student must cope at any one time workloads would be made more manageable, examinations would be staggered thereby reducing the amplitude of examination pressures and it would also provide more entry points to the course – permitting more flexibility for exemptions. There have been some experiments with 'intensive teaching' (*see for example, Parlett and King, 1971*) and part-time degree courses could be a fruitful field in which to apply the results.

4.14 Coursework

Coursework accounts, on average, for about 30 per cent of the assessment of part-time degree courses. Only five per cent of the respondents wanted it to have a smaller role in assessment than it currently does on their courses. On this evidence course teams that wish to increase the proportion of assessment accounted for by coursework would encounter little resistance from the students.

4.15 Distance learning

The findings of this study suggests that there is scope for introducing some *optional* distance learning units into CNAA part-time degree courses and that this would have a favourable effect on student retention. Some, at least, of the students would appreciate greater freedom to choose. However, the findings also suggest that the scope for fundamental innovations in this area is not large.

4.16 Programmed learning

Few of the students reported that they found programmed learning either pleasant or helpful. It would appear that distance learning based on programmed instruction would not find much support among these students.

4.17 Social cohesion

About 60 per cent of the respondents said that more contact with tutors and fellow students was a reason for choosing a CNAA part-time degree course rather than an Open University course. There would appear to be an important social dimension to the educational experience of those who choose CNAA part-time degree courses.

Those who are responsible for part-time degree courses might wish to reflect on how this can be developed to enhance the learning experience and the likelihood of successful completion.

4.18 Residential sessions

Residential sessions offer an opportunity to make available to the students a wider range of study methods and learning activities and to develop social cohesiveness among the course members. They also seem to reduce the likelihood of non-completion. In the light of the

findings of this report a residential weekend oriented towards enhancing study skills, improved time management and the development of self-help groups would seem to be worth considering, possibly at the start of a course.

4.19 Student feedback

The two dimensions of the courses which afforded least satisfaction to the students in the survey were the feedback to students on their performance and arrangements to make their voices heard in course evaluation. Course teams might reflect on ways in which feedback to students on their performance can be improved and ways in which feedback from students can be more systematically incorporated into the course evaluation process.

Course management teams might like to compare the level of satisfaction of students on their own courses with the findings of this survey. More generally, they might wish to use the students' questionnaire (or parts of it) developed for this study (available on request from CNAA Development Services) with their own students and compare the results presented in this report.

4.20 Academic support

Non-completion was higher for students who had missed classes due to work commitments or domestic commitments. The practice of providing, at the beginning of each session, a detailed programme of topics that will be covered each week (with appropriate readings) enables the student who has to miss classes for a week to maintain the continuity of their studies by private study. This practice is recommended.

At a much more speculative level it is possible that course providers could make greater use of cassette tapes as a means of tuition. The range of materials on cassette tapes has substantially increased in recent years and this is a resource that could be investigated. Alternatively, taped lectures would be an innovation for which many part-time students might be grateful. (*see Gibbs et al, 1984*)

4.21 Counselling

On the evidence of this study much reliance is placed on central counselling services for counselling part-time students. Institutions are likely to benefit from a review of the adequacy of these counselling facilities for part time students.

It is recommended that there should be a member of the counselling service within each institution with explicit responsibility for ensuring that the counselling needs of the part-time students are addressed.

4.22 Personal tutors

It is important that students on part-time degree courses recognise some member of staff (whether personal tutor or not) on their course with whom they can discuss difficulties that impact on their studies if only to ensure that the problems are, where appropriate, brought to the attention of the relevant examinations board. On a small part-time degree course it may be sufficient if the students can discuss problems with the course leader or a year tutor. It could be argued that some member(s) of each course team should be equipped with counselling skills.

4.23 Support from others

The respondents to the questionnaire drew most encouragement from their families and other members of the course (staff and fellow students). Course teams might reflect on how students might be encouraged to widen the base of their support to include less obvious people who are influential in their lives such as friends outside of work.

This study has revealed a generally supportive attitude by the employers of the part-time undergraduates and that this support is significantly related to non-completion. This raises the question of whether courses could draw more on this supportive attitude by providing students with estimates of some of the costs of completing the course (such as estimates of the cost of books and equipment requirements) and by certifying the reasonableness of items such as travel costs to and from college. This would presumably make it easier for students to claim support and it would probably also make it easier for employers to provide the support.

Courses are also encouraged to consider facilitating the development of self-help groups among the students to provide mutual support for when the going gets difficult.

4.24 On-site facilities

For over 50 per cent of the respondents, the availability of on-site facilities (libraries, computers, etc) was a reason for choosing a CNAA part-time degree course rather than an Open University degree course. College authorities might bear this in mind when they are making decisions about college facilities that will affect part-time students.

4.25 Library facilities

The students in this survey expressed good levels of satisfaction with the library opening hours and loan regulations but rather less satisfaction with the availability of books and journals recommended by staff. Some libraries make special library loan arrangements for part-time students and libraries could usefully compare practices in this area.

4.26 Refectory and pre-school child care facilities

These were the two factors that produced the highest proportions of dissatisfied respondents in the students' questionnaire. In a period of diminishing unit of resource it is inevitable that there will be an impact on the

adequacy of some facilities. However, it would be instructive to compare the ways that different colleges have coped in terms of the impact on part-time students.

4.27 Fees

Institutions might well consider the precedent of two institutions in this survey by investigating opportunities for introducing a 'payment by instalments' scheme for part-time students.

4.28 Students' unions

About two-thirds of the respondents were unaware of belonging to a students' union at their college. It is recommended that students' unions review their responsibilities to part-time students.

4.29 Fruitful co-existence of part-time courses at different levels

Over 30 per cent of the respondents had experience of previous study at the college at which they were enrolled for their CNAA part-time degree course. Over 20 per cent gave this as a reason for choosing their course rather than an Open University degree course. The maintenance of non-degree part-time courses is likely to be important to healthy enrolments on part-time courses at degree level.

A *majority* of the respondents expressed some positive interest in proceeding to further part-time study for a higher level academic course if this were possible at the college at which they were currently enrolled. This will be good news to those engaged in the development of postgraduate part-time degree courses for whom information on potential demand is difficult to obtain. It emphasises the value of the fruitful co-existence of part-time courses at different levels within the same institution.

4.30 Institutions

It is recommended that each institution should have a means of keeping permanently under review the character and quality of its part-time courses under the direction of a senior member of the institution (normally a member of the directorate or equivalent). This report provides a useful point of departure for such review.

4.31 Council for National Academic Awards

CNAA has produced no policy document focused on part-time students as a whole. It has produced no review of its part-time first degree courses since 1973. In view of the growth in part-time degree course provision over the last decade it is timely for the CNAA to conduct a general review to ensure that its policies in relation to part-time degree courses in general are co-ordinated at the level of regulations, administrative procedures and in terms of relationships with NAB and professional bodies.

Policy review: It is recommended that a working party of the new Committee for Academic Affairs be established containing those with expertise and experience of part-time provision to conduct this review and to address specific issues of relevance to part-time provision as appropriate. On the evidence of the course leaders' survey in this project the following issues are worth early attention: CNAA's fee arrangements, class contact hours and entry requirements with respect to mature entrants (including those with experiential learning) and those with BTEC qualifications.

Membership of CNAA: It is recommended that, in those subject areas with a significant number of part-time undergraduate courses, expertise and experience with part-time provision should be one of the criteria in the selection of CNAA committee members. It is also recommended that the proposed 'register of specialist advisers' should include those with expertise and experience of part-time provision.

Directory of courses: For the most part the 'market' for part-time courses and full-time (including sandwich) courses are separate. Those who are looking for a part-time course are a different population from those who are looking for a full-time course. This is recognised in the fact that most colleges produce a prospectus of part-time courses that is separate from the prospectus of full-time courses. In this respect the CNAA has something to learn from the best practice in the colleges. The CNAA's *Directory of first degree and Diploma of Higher Education courses* combines both part-time and full-time courses and this is unhelpful to prospective students. On the evidence of the part-time undergraduates' survey very little use is made of this directory by part-time students. A negligible number of respondents mentioned it as a first source of information about their course.

It is recommended that the CNAA produce *two* directories: one for full-time courses and another for part-time courses. Mixed mode courses could simply be included in both directories. At the very least it would be sensible to separate out the part-time from the full-time courses within the CNAA's directory of first degree and DipHE courses so that prospective students can more easily identify the courses that are relevant to their requirements.

Course interaction: It is recommended that the CNAA encourage the formation of standing committees of part-time degree course leaders in those subject areas with a significant number of part-time degree courses. The purpose of these groups would be to share the experience of developing and running the part-time degree courses. This would facilitate the dissemination of best practice, it would facilitate the solution of problems which individual course leaders are unable to tackle on their own, it would establish identifiable groups with expertise and it would provide a source of information and help for those who are developing part-time degree courses in particular subjects. There is at least one precedent in the Standing Committee for Part-time Business Studies Degree Courses which has provided considerable assistance to those engaged in the development of part-time degree courses in business studies and is now engaged in the

development of an inter-institutional part-time degree course by distance learning.

Dissemination events: It is recommended that CNAA organise a one-day workshop for part-time degree course leaders to disseminate the results of recent research into part-time degree course provision in general and the results of this project in particular. It is further recommended that CNAA (Development Services or Information Services) organise workshops to facilitate the sharing of experience and to disseminate best practice on specific issues of concern to course leaders. These could usefully include the following:

recruitment, publicity and course promotion;

induction programmes for part-time undergraduates;

admissions counselling and on-course counselling of part-time undergraduates;

study skills for part-time undergraduates;

teaching and learning methods for part-time undergraduates: extending the repertoire;

student non-completion.

Pamphlet/booklet: Finally, it is recommended that the CNAA sponsors the production of a pamphlet/booklet of guidance for those who are new to part-time degree level study to identify the most common difficulties encountered. It is hoped that the findings presented in this report will be valuable in the production of such a publication.

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APPENDIX

Suggested 'core' application form for part-time degree courses.

YORKSHIRE POLYTECHNIC

APPLICATION FOR ADMISSION TO A PART-TIME DEGREE COURSE

TITLE OF COURSE FOR WHICH YOU ARE APPLYING .....

Entry required for: Year ..... Month .....

SURNAME .....OTHER NAMES .....

Please indicate the name by which you prefer to be addressed (eg Tom rather than Thomas).....

DATE OF BIRTH..... NATIONALITY.....SEX.....MARITAL STATUS .....

Please indicate whether you have any physical handicap or other disability .....

.....

HOME ADDRESS (or correspondence address if different) .....

.....postcode ..... Telephone .....

FEES

Are your fees, or part of your fees, being paid by a sponsor ? .....

Sponsor's name ..... Training Officer ..... Telephone .....

PRESENT EMPLOYMENT

Name of Organisation and address (if teacher, state LEA) .....

.....

.....postcode.....Telephone.....

When did you join this organisation ? .....

Current job title ..... Date appointed to current position .....

PREVIOUS WORK EXPERIENCE (most recent first)*

DATES	JOB TITLE	EMPLOYER	RESPONSIBILITIES

PREVIOUS EDUCATION PLEASE LIST ALL EDUCATION SINCE THE AGE OF FIFTEEN INCLUDING SUBJECTS, LEVEL OF STUDY, QUALIFICATIONS/GRADES AND DATES. Please underline any courses that were undertaken on the basis of part-time study*.

REFEREES Please give the name of two referees, who can confirm your experience or qualifications and comment on your ability. (In the case of application for In-Service BEd one referee should be your Head Teacher, or ,if you are a Head , your Chief Education Officer.)

Name .....

Position .....

Address .....

.....postcode .....

Telephone .....

Name .....

Position .....

Address .....

.....postcode .....

Telephone .....

FURTHER INFORMATION PLEASE USE THIS SPACE TO a) say what you hope to gain personally, professionally or in other ways from this programme. b) give details of any other experiences, accomplishments or responsibilities that may be relevant to your application. c) provide additional information about yourself (eg your interests, activities, ambitions)*.

SIGNATURE ..... *DATE* .....

* If the space provided is insufficient please use additional sheets and firmly attach them to this form.

THIS FORM TO BE RETURNED TO: THE ADMISSIONS OFFICE, YORKSHIRE POLYTECHNIC, DALE ROAD, YORK